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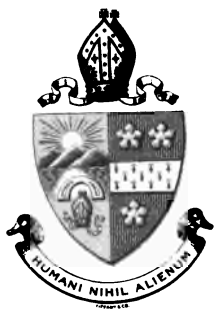
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# In the Gods' Shadow

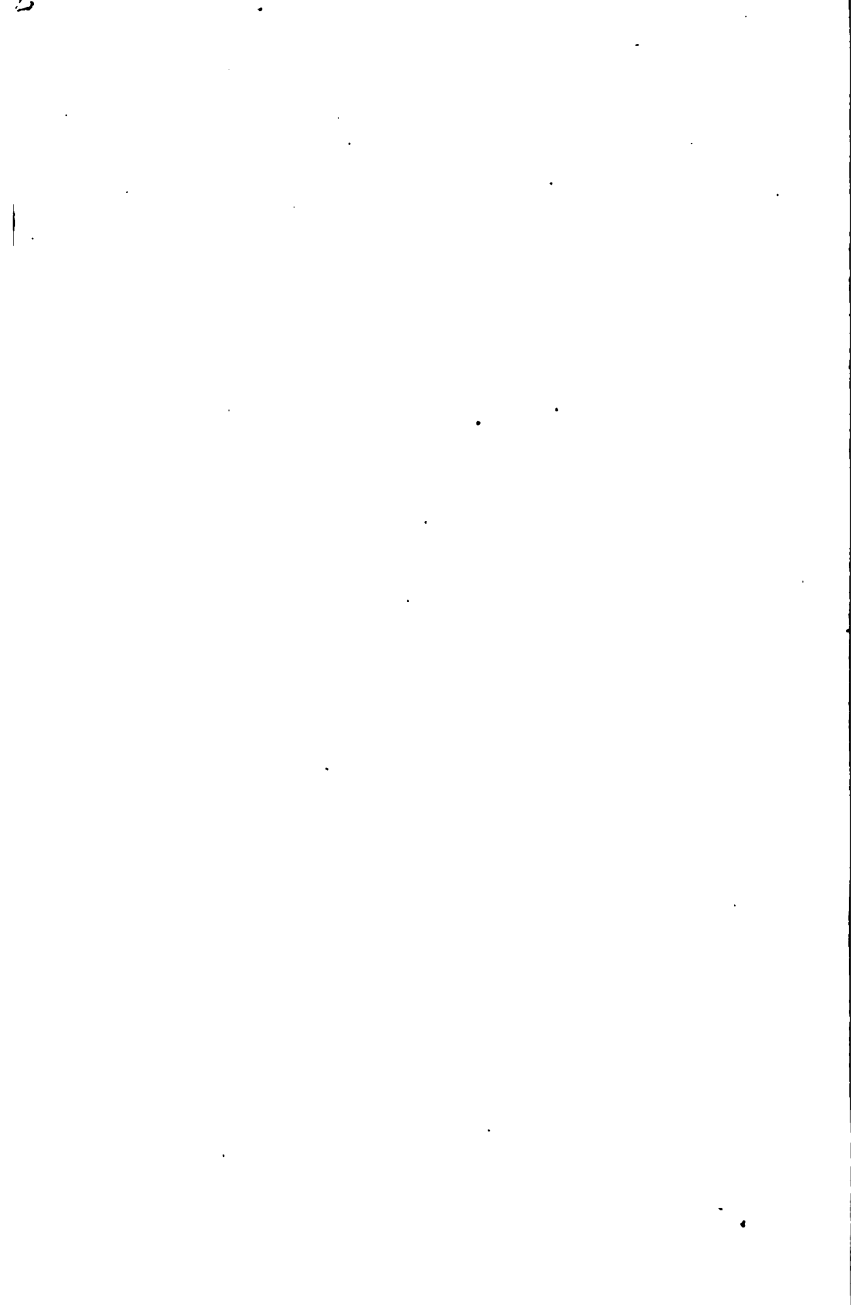


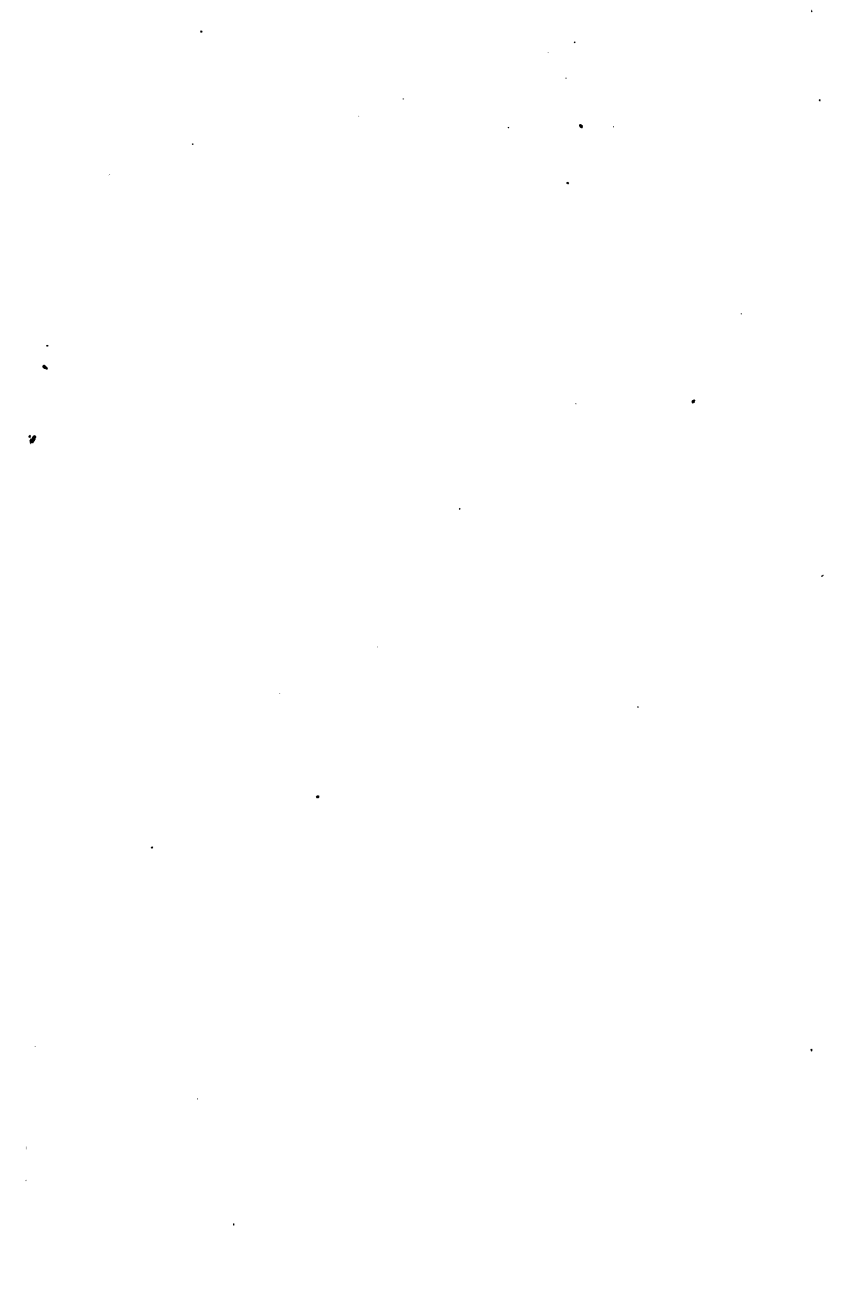
Henry Codman Potter

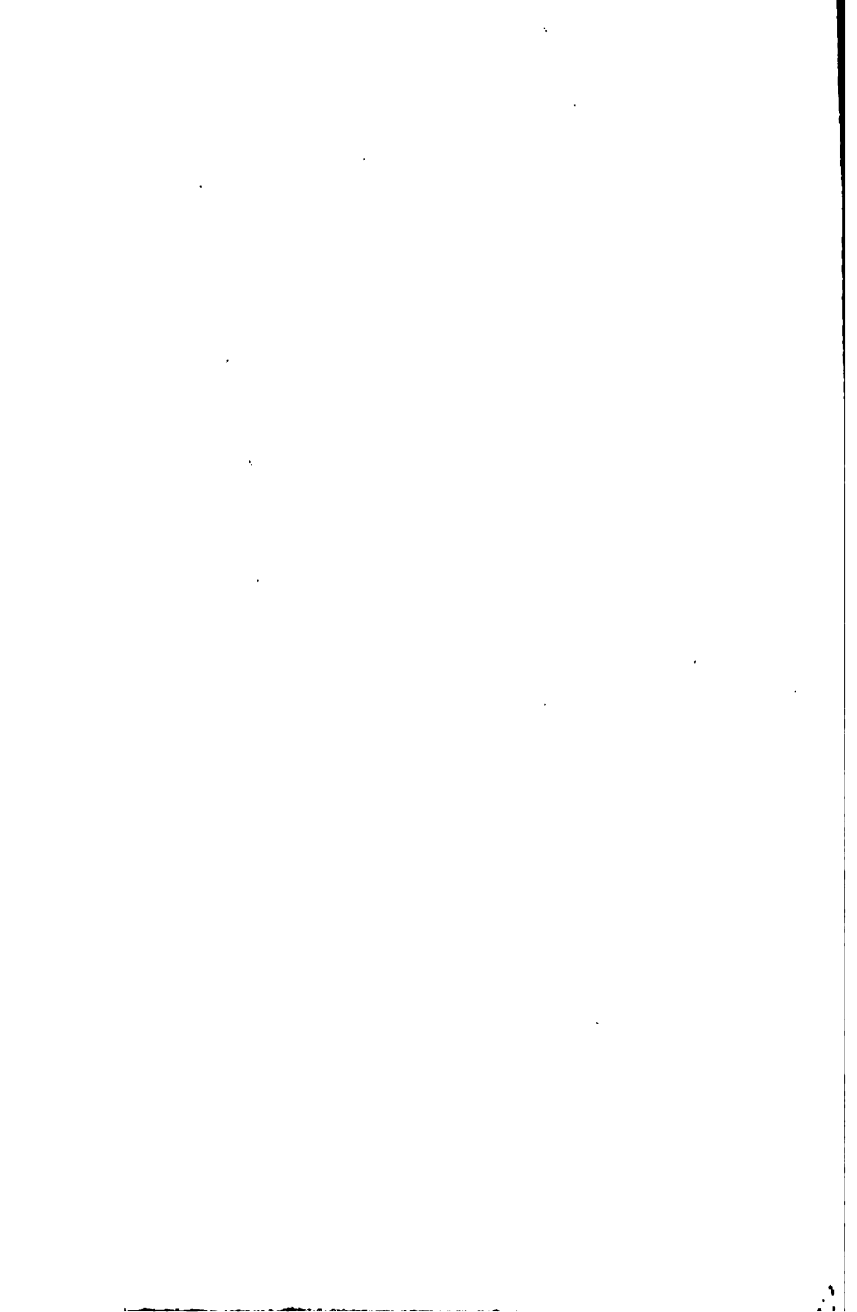


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# IN THE GODS' SHADOW

BY

GEORGE MACDONALD MAJOR

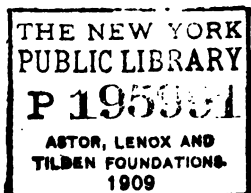


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GEORGE MACDONALD MAJOR.

“In the Gods’ Shadow” and “The Background of Mystery” have lain in my desk for the past three years. Some time I had expected leisure and inclination to revise them,— but upon re-perusal lately they seemed lacking in unity of construction or possibly are essentially unpoetical; at least I felt that I could not work out the idea I had in my own mind. It is probably folly to print what is unsatisfactory even to one’s self, but I could not consign them to oblivion without some little epitaph to mark their grave. The text for that epitaph will be culled from the critics.

*January 25, 1891.*

## Argument.

---

GALLUS POLLIO, a Roman gentleman of eminent ancestry, having loved the lady JULIA, marries her and discards his mistress VISTILLIA. After three years the latter, discovering that JULIA has become a convert to the religion of Christ, betrays her to the pagan priests upon the occasion of the annual sacrifice and festival given by the Pollio family. This she does in the hope of regaining the affection of GALLUS, but only accomplishes thereby his death and her own.

---

## Persons.

---

CHORUS OF PRIESTESSES.

CHIEF PRIEST.

PRIESTS.

GALLUS POLLIO.

JULIA, his wife.

VISTILLIA, formerly his mistress.

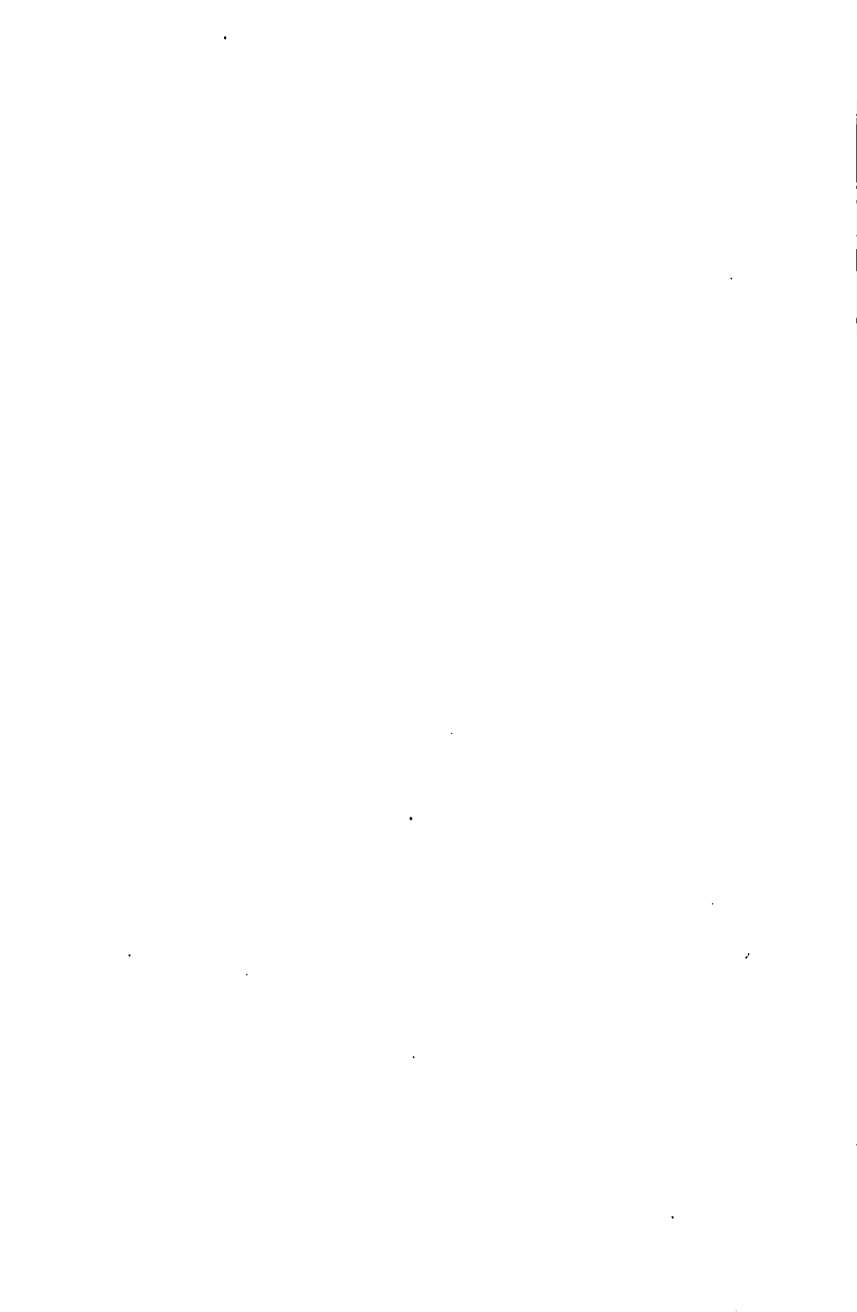
FLACCUS, brother to Vistillia.

NEIGHBORS in attendance, and BACCHANTES.

## Invocation.

---

*A lady in imperious beauty vain .  
Reminds me ever of the partial Muse  
Who scoffs his love who loves her most and sues  
To be the humblest vassal in her train.  
She scorns sobbed prayers and the incurable pain  
Of burning, haunting thought, that vainly woos  
Expression, since she does all aid refuse,  
Or mocks with echoes of elusive strain.  
What have I done that she should chase me thus —  
At wakening Morn, still Noon and whispering  
Eve ?  
What unpurged crime, save loving her too well,  
Thus to be doomed of song the Sisyphus,  
Or Tantalus, when Hope has turned to leave ?  
O Muse, grant just one song imperishable !  
January 22, 1888.*





## IN THE GODS' SHADOW.

---

*A hill set apart for sacrificial purposes on grounds of Gallus Pollio. Chorus of priestesses and priests in attendance, and while the neighbors, dressed in holiday attire, are assembling, the action begins.*  
*Time — Morning.*

### Chorus of Priestesses.

---

*First Priestess.*

The day has arisen  
In beauty and light ;  
The sunshiny heaven,  
The dew-beaded sods,  
No shadows imprison,  
No hint of the night.  
As Nature were given  
The smiles of the gods,

**In the Gods' Shadow.**

Beseeching whose favor  
These holiday folk,  
With worship and praises,  
With offerings and gifts  
Of incense and savor,  
A blessing invoke.  
Yet a veil o'er their faces  
My spirit uplifts,  
And low in their psalters  
I hear a refrain,  
A minor of sorrow,  
A funereal lay,  
A ghost at their altars  
That prophecies pain,  
A tragic to-morrow  
To follow to-day !

*Second Priestess.*

Alas, alas, alas !  
And art thou too possessed ?  
All night I saw, as in a glass,  
Foreboding specters pass, repass ;  
And when I trod this haunted grass  
A sudden terror filled my breast,  
As if some lurking god impressed  
My spirit to receive his dread behest.  
Even now the shade of some sad doom impending,  
Some dark, vague horror all-controlling,  
O'er my seized soul is rolling ;

Visions strange my being rending,  
Fire and ashes,  
Like the flashes  
Of Jove's anger with this morning worship blending!

*First Priestess.*

From what way comes this direly threatening fate?  
A blast of what god's hate?

*Second Priestess.*

Ah me, who knows?  
The wind that blows  
Far from the wild Tyrrhenian caves swells forth.  
Rain streaming from the east, cold shivering from  
the north.  
But who can resolve me the mystical meaning of  
dreams,  
Which with thick rushing phalanx my being sur-  
rounds and o'er-teems  
Like shadows of blackness that darken the mirrors  
of sun-loving streams?  
The mists of the day, and the clouds of the night,  
Without form, without words,  
Like a ghost making audible flight;  
Or the whirr of a million dark wings that reveal not  
the bodies of birds.  
Yet the day is born  
Of a perfect morn,



And the sights of the eye and the sounds of the ear  
Full of rapture and cheer.

*First Priestess.*

The clearest blue sky  
Has the thunderbolt nigh,  
And the calmest sea  
May the dreadest be ;  
So marvel not  
If the day most fair  
Brings the blackest lot  
And the night of care.  
For the envious gods  
Begrudge unto mortals  
Long living untroubled,  
But snare and entrap them,  
And plague them with sorrow,  
And visit the evil  
Of long generations  
On grandchildren's children ;  
Nor prayers nor oblations  
Preserve them from suffering.  
The greater the virtue,  
The grander the hero ;  
The gods give them glory,  
And pleasure, and riches,  
But still overbalance  
The scales of the blessing  
With wanderings and troubles,

**In the Gods' Shadow.**

11

False wives and false friendships,  
And dyings inglorious.  
The brand of a woman,  
The shaft of a coward,  
May send down to Hades  
The victor and taker  
Of many walled cities.  
This is of the gods,  
Who joy to see  
Man's race in the toils  
Of Destiny.

*Chorus of Priestesses.*

Alas, that we should know  
The coming woe !  
We virgin priestesses, that we  
Should feel the awful pangs of prophecy !  
Alas ! they borrow  
Who would know of the things to come but pain ;  
For increased knowledge is but added sorrow  
And madness in the heart and in the brain.  
But grant, great gods, this day marred in the  
making  
May not to us bear wailing and heartbreaking.  
Forbid that we should sup  
Of this day's awful cup.

*Priest.*

Why do you roll your eyes and speak strange words ?

**In the Gods' Shadow.**

*Chorus.*

The future looms before us dark and dread.

*Priest.*

Is it for us or you the sights you see ?

*Chorus.*

The god who sits upon our lips speaks not,  
But vaguely hints of woe and grief to come.

*Priest.*

To-day, or on the far-off shores of Time ?

*Chorus.*

The urgent motions in us point to-day.

*Priest.*

Look round and see — note where the clouds of fate  
Are resting o'er devoted heads foredoomed.

*Chorus.*

Where Flaccus and Vistillia talk apart,  
And walk this way, while in us gloom strange  
scenes  
Shotted with angry lightnings of the gods.

*Priest.*

Then one or both some shaft of gods will smite.

*Chorus.*

We cannot say. The visions veer and change ;  
But let us finish now our preparation.

*Flaccus.*

Sister, she is not here, as I foretold.

*Vistillia.*

You have not looked ; you have but looked amiss.

*Flaccus.*

My lids are fain to close from too much light,  
Peering in luminous eyes of white-souled women  
To catch a glimpse of her in this assemblage.

*Vistillia.*

As easily find some inconspicuous star  
When heaven's plains are studded with their host,  
As single her by sweeping round your eye.

*Flaccus.*

Nay, by the gods, she were the fairest here,  
Conspicuous as though she wore a crown —  
Her eyes outflashing all the women round.

*Vistillia.*

In Love's sight perhaps blind from ideal light,  
Choosing a candle to the fire-orbed sun.

*Flaccus.*

If ever I had loved that cloudless glance,  
This were the hour of the unrisen sun,  
That time of dawn not altogether dark,  
Because the cold, faint light of morning stars  
Blanches the backward turning face of Night,

Flitting to far-off shores, but yet not shining  
With the full lustre of oncoming Day,  
In that she was not foremost of them all.

*Vistillia.*

Grateful unto my ears must sound her praise.

*Flaccus.*

I cry your pardon, yet she is most fair.

*Vistillia.*

The curse of all the gods be on her head ;  
The vengeance of the Furies blight her days !  
Oh for the power to drive her through all climes,  
Accursed and mad with thirst and stung with pain,  
As jealous Juno drove the fair-haired Io  
From the rich plains of Argus further on  
To the white shores of the Mæotic strait !

*Flaccus.*

You love him still, my sister, even yet ?

*Vistillia.*

Was he not mine ? Had I not prior claim ?  
Had he not certified a thousand oaths  
Swearing he loved me, and for seven years,  
That seems now seven days, in which we grew  
No older ; not a hair turned gray nor wrinkle  
Upon our foreheads seamed to mark Time's flight.  
Exceeding happiness and changeless youth —

For seven sweet years did he not call me wife?  
 Wife of his heart — though not by public vows  
 Before a god's shrine wedded — till the day  
 She came, and like some god's incarnate curse  
 Turned love to hate — my day to hell-black night,  
 And shame — the shame that is the shamefullest;  
 The dread of women that with groans and tears  
 Causes the white-haired mother rue the hour  
 Her womb brought forth alive — this foulest shame  
 She brought me in her fascinating eye,  
 And in th' ensnaring cunning of her limbs,  
 Perfect in white proportions.

*Flaccus.*

Now the gods  
 Have given her your prey, what day more ripe  
 Than this to crown this pious festival  
 With a sublimer spectacle than lambs  
 Flower-chapleted upon their shining fleece?  
 Betray her to the augurs and the priests.

*Vistillia.*

What then — what proofs sustaining such a charge?

*Flaccus.*

She would acknowledge, yea, and not deny;  
 Even now I dare be sworn by all the gods  
 She is not further from this holy hill  
 Than I might cast a white stone through yon trees,  
 Standing like sentinel guards around his house,

And light upon his portico, perchance,  
Where to the symbol of her God she kneels,  
Praying against her husband's piety  
That gave to-day's oblation and the feast.

*Vistillia.*

That might await invidious reflection —  
How long since thou wert taint with this infection?

*Flaccus.*

The folly of my youth, ah, name it not !  
And yet, dear gods, it seemed a glorious hope  
To light the drear, dark slope of human life  
That only leads us downward to the grave.  
For what is life? — a breath, a dream, a flame ;  
Sweet odor of a flower or rank of weed ;  
A breath that perishes in its exhalation ;  
A dream of shadows, then a shadowless sleep ;  
A flame that dies even of itself consumed  
In the black void of Death — but Christ had dared  
To promise immortality and love  
From his inflowing divinity through faith.  
But this, too, ended as the lees of life —  
A breath, a dream, a flame that of itself  
Exhausted its vitality ! Ah ! list !  
The chant begins of those who, too, have been  
Deluded, but recant their errors now.

*A company who have abjured the Christian faith advance to the altar, singing as they slowly march :*

As exiles return to their own land  
From regions where men dread to be  
From wild wastes and salt seaweed-sown land,  
And sobbing winds moaning o'er sea —  
We turn to the gods that are living,  
Whose worship brings sunshiny days,  
And join at your altars in giving  
Oblations, sweet odors, and praise.

We come as escaping from prison,  
A dungeon-cell cheerless and damp,  
To the light of the sun fully risen,  
Who've known but a dull smoking lamp.  
From the stark, lifeless Christ on the gibbet,  
Whom vainly we deemed was divine,  
To the gods of our sires who exhibit  
A sweeter and lovelier shrine.

From the tomb of Earth's highest ambitions,  
A charnel-house full of dead joy,  
Where they taught us Love's fondest fruitions  
Allure to delude and destroy ;  
Where we made ourselves sad as we brooded  
And gave our days up to vain prayer,  
By the word of a dead man deluded,  
For a heaven we could not tell where.

But days lost in useless devotion,  
Oh memory bitter as gall !  
They have fled as the waves of the ocean,  
The gods even ne'er can recall.



Our youth and the joy that youth's store is,  
Desire and the great hopes that burn —  
Love, Pleasure, and Earth's fearless glories  
To us can, ah, never return.

For shadows will creep over heaven,  
A pall seem to darken the Earth,  
And Doubt brings Life surfeit for leaven  
And jangles the sweet bells of Mirth ;  
While the habit of Virtue — the fowler —  
Clips the wings of the fair bird Desire,  
Hard choice 'twixt the gloom of the cowl or  
The heart's smouldering, perishing fire.

*Flaccus.*

True as the sibyl's words or oracles  
On wave-worn cliffs or groves where gods are hid !  
The world no longer seems the same to me  
As in those fearless days when Pleasure shrined  
Herself in Nature, like a palpable god,  
And bade me follow. Flaming suns and stars,  
The torches that lit paths for reveling Night,  
Can never shine for me as in those times  
Of blood unchilled and heart, that felt desire  
Seedlike to grow or budwise to unfold  
Into the flower Fruition. Ah, methinks  
This is the Galilean's triumph yet,  
Gorgon-like, turning our diviner selves  
To stone of dead desires — heart-ashes, too,  
Like dust of last year's leaves and shriveled flowers,  
Eddied by frosty winds where the old paths

Of Love are brier-grown. So all my youth  
Was fed on barren hopes, as some poor babe  
That suckling finds the shriveled bosom milkless —  
My heart is choked with dust.

*Vistillia.*

A homily  
Which in the places where the Christians meet,  
With little change of words, had made them hear  
Christ's spirit speaking through you. Hark! again,  
The Bacchantes come forth dancing in reply.

*Bacchantes (Dancing and singing).*

Come dance and sing,  
While Youth and Spring  
Give Hope a wing  
To fly with;  
Ere Age and Care  
Steal unaware,  
And bring Despair  
To die with.

Hence, solemn fools,  
Ascetic rules,  
And cowléd schools,—  
Oh madness!  
When Love has lips,  
And Pleasure sips,  
The crushed grape drips  
In gladness.

**In the Gods' Shadow.**

No gifts to man  
 Are sweeter than  
 The wild god Pan  
     Doth measure ;  
 The sparkling grape,  
 The glowing shape,  
 That Love may rape  
     At pleasure.

Can calloused knees  
 Of devotees  
 Compare with these  
     For sweetness ?  
 With Sleep soft pressed  
 On fondled breast  
 To round Joy's best  
     Completeness.

*Flaccus.*

Like nymphs they dance as if their sinuous bodies  
 Were flexible and bent as reeds to winds,  
 To melodies of pastoral pipes, as once  
 Fauns and weird satyrs and the sylvan rout  
 In merry mad abandon danced with Pan.  
 But, to return :  
 This may be harvest-day, if you elect.

*Vistillia.*

I fain would win his soul by smiles of love —  
 Not barbs of hate and malice that corrodes,

For Love is mightier ; and had gods made men  
With souls to know the joys of constancy,  
Lasting, but hate, like fire and molten lead,  
Burns and destroys and lasts but for a time,  
And then dies out in ashes of remorse.  
But listen, Gallus speaks. O deathless gods !  
His very tones pierce through my heart like songs  
Of Love and Life.

GALLUS *from the brow of the hill addresses  
the assembly :*

*Gallus.*

Here on this green hill, neighbors, friends, and ye,  
If any such be here from other cities,  
Who love the gods whom Rome adores and loves —  
Here where I found this purple flower of Spring,  
The favorite of the blue-eyed goddess, here  
Bring wood to build an altar — build it thus  
So that the red-winged flame may find a way  
Through every part ; then let the Priests advance,  
Chanting their prayers to the immortal gods,  
And immolate the sacrifice ; and as  
The rich aroma borne on fragrant wings  
Of camphor, sandal, and Arabian gums,  
And washed in rare Falernian wines, ascends,  
Let the selected virgins, too, advance,  
And gathering in a circle clasp their hands  
And sing the praises of the gracious gods,  
And supplicate the blessings of the year.

But first, as fit, seeing that every Spring,  
Soon as the sap begins to circulate  
Through the white woody arteries of the trees,  
I have for many years upon these grounds —  
My father's from his father's, and continuing  
The pious custom which he ne'er forgot —  
Offered the gods a sacrifice of praise,  
I once again repeat my public prayers,  
Not with lip-service, if I know my heart,  
But with the inward unction of the soul ;  
For quiet days of life and such a state,  
Balanced between th' effeminate luxury  
Wealth o'ermuch breeds, and the immoral care  
And griping tempt of ill-fed poverty,  
Whereby I find the time to feed my mind  
With the great words and deeds of noble men ;  
Seers and sweet singers, men of golden speech,  
Shooting my thoughts after their own high aims ;  
And chiefly do I thank th' undying gods  
For reverence and the spirit of belief  
Which in me is, and for my mother's heart,  
Kindly intentioned unto everything ;  
Sorrows of men and creatures everywhere,  
And that delight in Nature which I feel —  
Sun, moon, and stars, flower-growings, whispering  
nights,  
Bird songs, and chirps of crickets in the fields,  
And lovely fluttering of bright-blossomed winged  
things

O'er woodland pools where Dryads might be hid,  
Or reedy meadows fit for shaggy fauns.  
Also I thank the gods with thanks unfeigned  
For a pure name bequeathed me from a line  
Of ancestry white with unsullied fame,  
Extending back beyond that distant day  
When fled o'er the salt sea from Greece he came —  
My ancestor coeval with this town,  
A warrior mighty on the wave and land —  
To build himself an enviable name  
And house on Roman ground, and with this name  
Not unknown in the world, and in times past  
Father and grandsire both in the front ranks  
Of enterprise and glory, I give thanks  
That I can joy in glorious deeds, and read  
Great books, and hear immortal songs without  
Feeling the urgent spirit of Ambition  
Spurring me from my quiet fields and fire  
To seek new laurels, or to tease the Muse,  
Praying for musical words and rhythmic thought,  
Which I so love; and last, but also chief,  
Even as reverence, faith, and other gifts,  
Good through and through and without stain of evil —  
Last-mentioned, since to praise I must add prayer,  
I thank the gods for the white light of home,  
A noble wife in whom is triple grace;  
Grace of a perfect form and radiant face,  
Sweet eyes and voice and long and lustrous hair;  
Grace of a mind unsullied, and more rare,

Grace of a spotless soul of womanhood  
Who seeks her honors in her husband's praise.  
Loving and gentle, sacrificing self,  
And making of her common household duties  
Sacraments all, and of her charms and powers  
Helps and new ways to cheer her husband's life,  
To lighten all his labor, buoy his hope,  
Redouble joy and lessen care by half:  
But unto us, and romping through our halls,  
The prattle of sweet children, our own fruit,  
Sounds not; nor round our hearth on snowy nights,  
While the red-hearted log throbs in the fire,  
Faces of her and me in miniature  
Shine not. Wherefore for this we pray the gods  
Fruitful to make the augur's prophecy,  
Which promised me that from her womb should  
    spring  
Children to take the edge from our old age,  
So that I may see, long ere whitening hairs,  
Red lips upon the pink buds of her breasts:  
Offspring — the flower and fruitage of our love.  
And something like a gloom is o'er our house,  
Impalpable yet real, for my sweet wife  
Some vague indisposition clouds her heart,  
In that she is not here nor cares to come;  
Wherefore I end my praise and prayers with this:  
That the dear gods remember her past life,  
White as the sunlight and as fragrant showers,  
And so restore the joys of other days.

CHIEF PRIEST *arising in his robes addresses  
Gallus first and then the assembly :*

*Chief Priest.*

The gods unto the upright man whose heart  
Is fixed to give them worship all his days  
Look ever with sweet favor — when they give,  
Gracious, and gracious when their hands withhold.  
For men pray often to their hurt, and often  
The gods give wicked men their hearts' desire,  
In anger to destroy them, and to prayer  
Persistent nor submissive they send meat  
That surely brings great leanness to their lives.  
And thee, dear Gallus, have the gods long loved,  
And made thee fat with blessings, and no doubt  
Will make the augur's prophecy true in time ;  
But be not over-desirous, for though blest  
The increase of the womb and of good omen,  
Strengthening pure love with stronger bands and  
bringing  
New ties and pleasures, and to wedded women  
New honors and more rounded perfect life,  
And to the father graver thoughts and duty —  
Yet oft the mother nurses at her breast  
Her future's greatest sorrow, and gives life  
And milk of love and yearning of her heart,  
Prayers and the sleepless vigils of long nights  
To children's weal that thrive in years to come,  
To bring her and the sire whose love they shared



Disgrace and heartbreak and a ruined home.  
This have I said, emboldened by my office,  
Not as though Gallus needed from my lips  
Reproof or guidance, for we know him well  
As one well pleasing to th' undying gods,  
And faithful in his ways, and all his house,  
Whom all men honor, and a citizen  
Whom rulers do delight in. Such a man  
Brings safety and the blessings of the gods  
To the community wherein he dwells —  
A model for young men, and to his friends  
Companionable hours that leave no sting,  
Wise thoughts and holy sayings and strong cheer  
To heavy hearts and minds perplexed and vexed.  
And now, dear friends, upon this altar raised  
Of unhewn stones, we offer to the gods  
The red flesh and the golden fat of lambs,  
Wine-washed and mingled with the ruby blood,  
The fleece and heart and ivory bones entire,  
And spices, and rich odors, and rare flowers.  
But let not any soul deceive itself,  
Nor think burnt-offerings savory to the gods,  
From unclean hands and sodden lives of sin,  
Which are most execrable in their eyes,  
A stench unto their nostrils; and for such  
Their wrath comes on men to the uttermost —  
Famines and plagues of sickness and of wars,  
Fires and disease among their flocks, and dearth  
Of crops and madness and contrary spirits;

Temptations to destruction and base deaths.  
 Therefore let each one question his own soul,  
 And try his spirit, if with simple faith,  
 And love and deep repentance for ill thoughts,  
 Pure purpose and intent to live aright,  
 He kneels and offers to the heart-reading gods  
 His prayer and praise ; and let such be assured  
 The gods to him are listening and grant prayers,  
 And all that comes to him, however clothed  
 In what strange raiment, even though of pain,  
 Comes mercifully, and sent forth of gods  
 To prove him and to make his after life  
 More precious. And to such Death makes not  
 Life

A trembling slave that fears the Master's call,  
 But resting on the favor of the gods  
 Gives up his breath, like one whom Glory seeks  
 With hands and heart ready for any fate.

*The sacrifice is offered and the Priests advance  
 singing :*

*First Priest.*

Should there be any one here  
 Wicked in hand and in heart,  
 Straying afar from thy fear,  
 Gods, or have fallen apart  
 From thy worship and service, forgive  
 And let the offending soul live.

**In the Gods' Shadow.***Second Priest.*

Here, if, unfilial in soul,  
Maidens and men shall have stood,  
Let not thy hot anger roll,  
Spare ye the innocent blood.  
O gods, pardon freely the vice,  
Accepting the soul's sacrifice.

*Third Priest.*

Sins of the mind and the body,  
Sins of the flesh and the soul,  
Youth with the hot blood all ruddy,  
Age that has not learned control—  
The sins that beset and that harden,  
O gods, that are merciful, pardon.

*All Priests.*

For now in the warm breathing atmosphere  
hover  
The blessings of heaven, the sunlight and rain,  
That falling on just and the unjust discover  
The hearts of the gods to the children of men;  
And as green plants that blossom return back to  
heaven  
The sweet living odors flower-hidden again,  
So the human heart touched sues for self first  
forgiven,  
And then for all sinners repenting their stains.

*Virgins advance singing.*

*First Virgin.*

For the blessing that lies  
In the sunshiny skies,  
For the blessing the dew-fall and rain-shower  
supplies —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Second Virgin.*

For the warm lapping airs,  
For the soil that prepares,  
Like a soul rich in pure thoughts the harvest it  
bears —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Third Virgin.*

For the hope of the tree,  
And the promise that be  
In the vine and the tuber and the fruit of the sea —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Fourth Virgin.*

For the flocks that increase,  
For their milk and their fleece,

For the herds that grow sleek in the pastures of  
peace —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Fifth Virgin.*

For the joys we have had,  
For the hopes that make glad  
The hearts that without them were heavy and sad —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Sixth Virgin.*

For all Beauty and Love,  
And sweet spirits that move  
And speak to our souls from the spring and the  
grove —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Seventh Virgin.*

For the winds that waft home,  
O'er the perilous foam,  
The white-pinioned ships that to foreign parts  
roam —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*A Matron (kneeling).*

For the child from the womb,  
And the voice from the tomb,  
And the oracle chasing its shadows of gloom —

*All in concert.*

We praise thee, O bountiful gods.

*Priests and Virgins.*

Liberal gods that float on invisible wings,  
Deep in the steel-blue depths of the ice-chilled  
springs ;  
Gods whose viewless steps are in solitudes  
Of whispering lithe green leaves and the murmuring  
woods ;  
Tolerant gods that linger in affluent plains  
Of velvet grass, fresh wet from the warm recent rains ;  
Divinities all, whose majesty consciously fills  
The summits, upraised altar-like, of the loftiest hills,  
Or who dwell in languorous ease  
'Neath the rushes of the seas,  
Or the fondling generous air,  
Spirit essence everywhere,  
Incorporeal deities,  
In or under curved blue skies ;  
Gods of seasons, calms, and storms,  
Gracious face or frowning forms,  
Whom we serve or love or fear ;  
Gods whose wills forecast the year,

And whose wishes are the springs  
Of the ways of Luck and Chance,  
All misnamed haphazard things,  
All we know as Circumstance;  
All the powers where'er they be,  
That we feel but cannot see,  
Jove and Neptune, Mars and he,  
Swift wing-footed Mercury;  
Venus, lily-like, when she  
Blossomed from the silvery sea,  
Shaggy satyr, goat-hoofed Pan,  
And the water-nymphs that run  
From the sight of mortal man,  
Lest their eyes profane should scan  
White breasts drying in the sun —  
Each we honor here and raise  
Prayer, burnt-offerings, and praise.  
Grant us length of pastoral days,  
Joys of home and prosperous ways;  
Hearts without the vain pretense  
That begets irreverence;  
And a body likewise whole,  
Free from blemish as the soul;  
Godlike strength and temperate health  
And sufficiency of wealth.  
Prayer the wife with husband joins  
For the dear fruit of their loins;  
Bless clasped hands and reverent knees  
And sweet domesticities;

And in grassy wastes preserve  
Eweless lambs that bleat, and swerve  
From the fleecy folds that share  
Safety in the shepherd's care.  
Bring to stalk and golden ear  
Pregnant seeds to planters dear,  
Guarding waving fields from stings,  
Awl of gnat or horny wings.  
Save in harvest fruit-bent trees  
From bird-bills and wasps and bees,  
Or in red-leaf days and sunny,  
When the sap is changed to honey,  
Keep our maples from the breath  
Gale-blown from salt seas of Death.  
So in humble piety  
Shall our days and wishes be,  
Shall each life unstained by crimes,  
Civic turmoil of the times,  
Or the sin Ambition shares,  
Grow from youth until it bears  
Snow-white crown of reverent hairs ;  
And at Nature's closing ray  
Death be but the shining way  
Twilight leads the dying day,  
Sleep that soothes the weary hour  
Or the closing of a flower,  
Gently to that world from this,  
And unsorrowing, like Dis.



*A Priest.*

The rites are done. The blood-red altar smokes  
 With wine and pleasant savors to the gods,  
 Who also love to see the sons of men  
 Light-heartedly enjoy earth's fresh good gifts;  
 Therefore let each be lord of his own time,  
 Led of the joy that seemeth good to him,  
 In game or dance or as he will till noon.

*They separate to various dances, and games  
 and social conversation.*

*Chorus.**First Priestess.*

The god again hath seized my soul,  
 Again I see dark shadows roll  
     Some awful ill portending.  
 Two forms but now before me stood,  
 But dimly seen and stained with blood :  
 Alas, what horrent evils wait  
 The soul the gods immortal hate !  
 In envy or for sin undoing  
 Ever ceaselessly pursuing ;  
     Ever with their actions blending  
 Till they overwhelméd be  
 In the grasp of Destiny.

*Second Priestess.*

Is one a woman's form ?  
 As lithe as Dian buskined for the chase,

Or Hebe ere she fell, all smiles, all grace?  
Alas, on her white bosom can you trace,  
    Yet breathing soft and warm,  
A drop, a jet that now becomes a flood—  
    Away, it is of blood!  
O star-zoned Venus, that a thing so fair  
    So dread a fate should share!

*First Priestess.*

The burden is of love betrayed,  
Nor wedded wife, nor virgin maid,  
Is this the fruit love bears—  
Delicious sins and heavy-eyed despairs?  
O woman, ever weak and ever mourning,  
    Ever to thy heart and love a prey,  
The sorrow and the lonely desolate yearning,  
Or else the darkness and the constant burning  
    When men and gods betray  
Virtue that yields not, dying broken-hearted,  
Or, sadder still, life, love, and hope, and fame  
    departed!

*Second Priestess.*

Ah me, whichever way the fates may prove,  
An altogether evil thing is Love;  
And wise is she who, held in Dian's chaste  
    protection,  
Has steeled her heart against the gods, and men's  
    affection.

Woe to the virgin whose uncovered charms  
The amorous Jove espies !  
Alas, the sheen of bare white legs and arms,  
Or bosoms that tempt deities from the skies !  
The vengeance of the goddesses pursue,  
The wrath of Juno will the hapless maiden rue,  
And man's love e'er is made of broken faiths  
And jealous sorrows and unholy deaths.

*Chorus of Priestesses.*

Darker clouds arise,  
And on the Earth the red of blood.  
A shower of flame rains downward from the skies  
Seething the grass, wet with th' ensanguined  
flood.  
The vision grows more clear.  
Alas, the dread fulfilment draws more near,  
The drama of the gods is ripe for speech ;  
Two actors come, dread Fate pursuing each !

*At various parts of the field the revelers are  
seen, while Vistillia and Gallus approach  
from different directions and meet at the  
base of the hill of sacrifice.*

*Gallus.*

I had not dreamed to find thee here to-day.

*Vistillia.*

Once thy quick eye had pierced a larger throng,

Impatient and expectant for my face,  
Or meeting unexpectedly surprise  
Had doubled joy. Alas, how changed thou art !

*Gallus.*

With no ill-will. Oh, I would spare thee pain ;  
The gods that read the open hearts of men  
Know I would not add so much weight of sorrow  
Unto thee as th' impalpable burden borne  
Upon the sessile thistle-seed in air.

*Vistillia.*

In every word thou dost unsheathe a dagger.

*Gallus.*

Not purposely. Oh, let our paths divide  
As the divergent streams that meet no more !

*Vistillia.*

Once parting was to thee the curse of Jove.

*Gallus.*

Full well I know th' intention of thy thought ;  
But there are words a woman should not speak,  
Thoughts she should veil, nor by a blush confess,  
And feelings which should roll no surging wave  
Of bold expression tongeward for her sex —

*Vistillia.*

Love is not circumscribed in ardent souls  
By sex, or by the stale decrees of custom ;

But sexless, like a disembodied spirit,  
Pleads its dear cause ; or, like the incensed Jove,  
Thunders its wrath and shrieks for dire revenge,  
Even though fleshed in woman's frailer frame,  
As 'tis a law a prophetess may speak,  
When brooded o'er by the oracular god,  
With the divine authority of a priest,  
Unheded by the restrictions of her sex,  
Though born a woman and by fame debarred.

*Gallus.*

Oh say not so ; nay, but thou art too bold,  
O'erleaping womanly usage and shy ways,  
Birdlike, that so become her milder soul ;  
And to be over bold finds less desert,  
Even in th' insatiate eyes of uncloyed Love,  
Than to be over coy, which whets Desire.

*Vistillia.*

What changed unnatural heart is this of thine,  
Whose fountains spray forth waters sweet and  
bitter !  
Gods ! what a different burden was thy plaint  
When first thy soul confessed in me a sovereign !  
My unwon spirit, free and passion-proof,  
Like Dian, scorned the yoke of mortal man,  
And with unfeigned indifference heard thy suit,  
Loving to rather lose myself in fields  
Of yellow bloom, blue larkspur, or to climb  
O'er dizzy crags most inaccessible,

Journeying the sun-bright Summer ; or by the sea —  
The gale-blown sea whose salty spray and air  
Breathes but of Neptune's mermaids amber-haired —  
I loved to wander gathering curious shells ;  
Else o'er the glittering wave, when other girls,  
Their white arms flashing even as its crest,  
Rowed, I was foremost of the fleet ; yet praise  
Of man I valued not, especially thine.  
Then to thy wild persistence and despair  
I listened curiously, and lo, Compassion —  
A god astray to do a virgin harm —  
Pleading thy cause fulfilled my woman's doom :  
A maid who harkens ever is undone.

*Gallus.*

Even the gods pursue, the virgins flee,  
Showing us the celestial way of Love —  
The man aggressive, but the virgin shy.

*Vistillia.*

Was I not such ? Alas, but love confessed,  
The shadow Shame flits like the cloudy Night  
Before the kindling Day dissolvéd quite.

*Gallus.*

Love is a fawn that shuns the hunter's eye  
In leafy copse, and woman wins this way,  
Fleeing Love's ardent glance and haunting step,  
And yet inflames more by her blushful shame  
Than beauty unabashed that turns to woo.

*Vistillia.*

Yea, even a wild gazelle upon the hills,  
Conquered at last, forsakes its rocky haunts  
To smooth the tamer's hands. Ah, doubly harsh,  
Snakelike in tongue as those whose twice-forked  
fang

Cuts the receding flesh, and in the wound  
From the near bulb injects a poisoned flood —  
Thou, first to win with long persistent suit,  
And then to argue thus ! Whose genial ray  
First thawed the ice of maidenly reserve,  
Striving to haste the Spring of Love to Summer,  
And chid me then for being over frigid  
As now for the reverse ?

*Gallus.*

This is a woman :  
Fragrant, a flower, the darling of the sun,  
Veiling its beauty when the god of day  
Closes his loving eye — that droops and wilts  
Until his beams shine light and love again :  
But when the winter time of love has come  
Dies blossom, leaf, and root.

*Vistillia.*

There is one sun  
Potent that brings to birth and blesses all,—  
Grass, tree, and flower, and every living thing,—  
Light-loving, but it grows no bitterness.

Oh, surely ne'er was bitterness like Love's,  
Sweet to the lips, but gall unto the soul.  
There is one only sun, but many men.  
Suitors innumerable were at my feet;  
Strong, too, of arm, and fleet of foot as thee,  
Brave, and in mind and soul not less than thee.  
Ah, serpent-wise again, why didst thou seek  
One, mayhap sole of all, who feigned to love  
Assiduously to win my maiden heart,  
Then trample it as tigers sprung for prey  
Crush the wild flowers they sniffed beneath their  
paws,

Careless what love of bees or light of sun  
Cared for and nourished them. This is a man :  
A changeful tyrant, faithful when disdained,  
Constant to frowns and suing when denied.  
Ardent pursuing ; in possession cold,  
To whom the heart a clinging captive made  
Has lost its most attractive charm and gift.  
Ah me, inconstant as the treacherous sea !  
What men call Love is Passion's least foul guise  
Arrayed in stolen robes of royal love,  
As cold gray flint or snow on mountain tops  
In distance gleams like silver veins, or gems.  
Have I not found it so ?

*Gallus.*

O libelous

And harsh, to hold the reason of a man



T' account, for the light fancy of a boy !  
Who mourns last Summer's sweetness in this May?  
But rather thanks the gods for pleasures past,  
And seeks t' extract from new and living sources  
Their deep-pent treasures, as the thieving bee  
Flits o'er dead flowers, but sucks from living bloom  
The sugary deposit.

*Vistillia.*

Have three years,  
That even on Cæsar, with the ponderous weight  
Of world-wide empire pressing on his soul,  
Have left no visible mark — have three short years  
So widened, broadened, amplified thy soul  
That now the man scorns th' unaccountable boy ?  
How has thy taste improved — thy soul grown  
grand ?

What now inspires that then thy mind knew not  
Being dull and eyeless to its higher range ?  
In what to which thy soul was then attuned,  
The perfect harmonies that swell therein  
Now hear but discord as our skilled musicians  
Turn stunned from clanging of barbaric horns  
Or art thou still the same, and it may be  
Some fatal fault in me — some dire defect  
Hid from thy sight three years ago is now  
In all its rude deformity exposed ?  
Or perhaps ungentle time, and partial too,  
Dealing, like men, less tenderly with woman

Than man, 't is haply some sad mark of age,  
Grief, or the burning fire of Love itself,  
Flaming too fiercely for the too weak lamp  
In which it shrined itself, are all to blame.  
Yet if a cheek or eye alone intralld  
This cheek, is it less fair? these eyes less true,  
This heart less loving — yea, this heart less chaste?  
Thou durst not say it, yet this love of mine —

*Gallus.*

Is Love a wanton whose salacious eye  
By the mere catalogue of fleshly charms  
Is snared, as gallants in the streets of Rome  
Follow inviting eyes or shapely legs,  
Or glowing bosoms smooth to all men's hands?

*Vistillia.*

Have I no claim? And after all these years?

*Gallus.*

Then Love is that great bitter ill of men,  
Dreaded than Death, or that appalling change  
When wise lips lose their wisdom, and instead  
Babble of foolish fancies and strange thoughts  
Fantastic — then is Love the bondsman's curse.  
When the heart changes, if with iron ties  
Law shackles still the soul to one unloved,  
Fast bound, like galley slaves unto the oar,  
So to the heart's aversion. By the gods!

What man can bid Love go or bid him stay?  
If love be free, then lovers joy as gods.  
But the unwilling kiss, or forced embrace,  
Is as a dead man's touch.

*Vistillia.*

How many times  
Vehemently hast thou argued otherwise,  
Swearing what oaths that thou wert ever mine?

*Gallus.*

Forbear — if that sweet helplessness of woman  
That cannot plead its love, but voiceless dies —  
If that be not in thee, then summon pride,  
That sterner virtue of our Roman ladies;  
That serious vestal call, Philosophy,—  
Whate'er may nerve thee calmly to bear sorrow,  
That as thy soul resolved thus bravely dares  
Will crystallize its bitter into sweetness;  
For all souls find in their extremity  
The gods have pitted deep in seeming Sorrow  
Th' eternal kernel Joy. Oh, hold it true,  
And pain —

*Vistillia.*

The gods now judge between us twain.  
Just are the gods, and not to be deceived  
By words that echo with a pious sound,  
Or bribed by altars heaped and obvious zeal.  
I, if for sin the gods, who cannot bear

Foulness or aught uncleanness of soul —  
I now bear punishment as those who have  
Transgressed their law, yet not the less to thee,  
The instrument by whom the gods afflict me,  
Will come in their due time affliction too,  
In that thy hand hath smitten without pity,  
Being alike in guilt, and with smooth words,  
Each as the cat's paw, velvet to the touch,  
Hides in its cushion the sharp piercing claw,  
Cutting a jagged sorrow in my soul,  
Worse than keen tusk or tearing claw. Aye, know  
Even now I am avenged ; the draught of woe  
Which thou so heartlessly wouldst have me quaff  
The gods give thee.

*Gallus.*

Thou speakest as with power.  
What meanest thou? what threat lies in that word?

*Vistillia.*

Thou hast despised my love for one less warm.

*Gallus.*

Beware ! Let not thy lips forswear thy life.

*Vistillia.*

The cold, chaste beauty that holds thee enthralled  
Scarce loves thee — on mere sufferance stands thy  
love.

*Gallus.*

Durst thou ! — Oh, even thou shouldst fear my hate !

*Vistillia.*

Nay, prove it to thyself, if thou wouldst see.  
She meets thee not with raptures as of old,  
Nor eyes enkindled eloquent with love,  
Renewing youth and hope on each occasion  
With a fresh gladness, nor a wistful face  
Where hunger yields to final satisfaction  
To greet thy coming home. About her lies  
An air of chill abstraction as of one  
Indifferent, or who dwells in other worlds,  
Her body here but all her thoughts and spirits  
Alien, and her eyes on other scenes,  
Or even as one awaking from a couch,  
Sleep-walking. Does she ever praise thee now ?  
Neighbors and friends and all who know thee well  
Praise thee — does e'er their praise awake her  
pride ?

The things thou lovest, are they made her care ?  
Surely it well becomes a Roman wife,  
Who holds the praise of far-off men and times  
Worthless or trivial balanced in the scale  
With commendation from the man she loves,  
Their children, or a-building happy homes —  
It well becomes her as the bridal wreath  
Blossomed and wound around her shining hair  
To make her husband's hopes hers, and his tastes  
Hers, and to see through his eyes and to feel  
Her heart and his throb pulse for pulse, not two  
But one indissolubly united heart ;

Twin blossoms springing from a common stem  
And welded by contiguous growth to one.

*Gallus.*

The gods have made thee variant with thyself,  
Mouth against heart, for this, though filled with  
hate

And evil surmise that the gods who guard  
Pure souls against the craft of evil minds,  
Have used to limn with nice precision, my wife,  
In whom there is no difference in the least  
From thy true picture of a perfect wife,  
No wanderer from her home nor save indeed.  
As all true hearts delight in good men's praise,  
Anxious to please the thoughts of aught save me,  
From whom her joys and honors radiate,  
In whom her thoughts and highest hopes are centered ;

Therefore, this knowing, steeled against suspicion,  
The sickly spleen of thy vile jealousy  
On my invulnerable faith  
Makes no impression more than yeasty waves  
Upon the iron-hard prow that cuts them through  
But even if thy surmisings were all true,  
I love her more than ever I loved thee.

*Vistillia.*

She loves another more than she loves thee,  
And so the gods avenge me on thy wrong.

*Gallus.*

My love may laugh at this. Oh weakly false,  
She who is "cold" and "chaste" and "chill," be  
sure  
The current of her blood runs ever thus,  
Seeking no paramour or guilty love.

*Vistillia.*

By all the gods I swear I speak the truth :  
She loves a malefactor more than thee.

*Gallus.*

Name him — attire this most improbable lie  
In hell's worst cunning, but its livery  
Would fit so ill, the figure were grotesque.

*Vistillia.*

Ah, lynx-eyed mole when lovers are compared !  
Trusting that will not harbor fear nor see !  
Gallus, thou fightest an almighty rival —  
A woman's religion — the proverbial zeal,  
Of a young convert's fresh and novel faith,  
Before which fade all love and hopes of men.  
Nor wisdom of gray hairs nor strength of arm,  
Power nor the quick agility of youth  
Nor honors nor the sweetest gifts of Earth  
Have power to cope with the enthusiasm  
New converts feel, but smitten to death and slain  
Ingloriously, and even a mother's love

Turns evil to the prattling babe that lies  
Held on her knees and with its dimpled feet  
Toying ; how much more to her husband's creed,  
Which in the sight of her enlightened eyes  
Is evil as the plague or snake-wise cursed.

*Gallus.*

I follow not thy meaning — art thou mad ?

*Vistillia.*

The criminal executed in Judea,  
The Christ so-called — this white-souled wife of  
thine  
Is of those atheists who worship him ;  
So if perchance  
Thou wouldst now go unto the Coliseum,  
Or to a feast, or to a public game,  
Or even as now give offerings to the gods,  
She will not dare profane herself to go,  
Preferring with that low, malignant sect  
Hating mankind to hold unnatural orgies  
Unfit for the pure eyes of day to see.

*Gallus.*

Thou hast cut in my heart ; if this be true —

*Vistillia.*

Hadst thou been less her slave it had been patent.

*Gallus.*

How didst thou learn it ? How cam'st thou to know ?



*Vistillia.*

What matter how one sick caught the disease?

*Gallus.*

'T is false ! The gods I serve would spare me this.

*Vistillia.*

Have I not served them? Have they spared me  
pain ?

*Gallus.*

But not to suffer such a shame as this —  
A wife false to the gods and my deep love.

*Vistillia.*

Why worse than thee, false to my love and fame?

*Gallus.*

But truly she did fondly love me once.

*Vistillia.*

But now her love and lips are all toward Christ.

*Gallus.*

A Jew — a Jew — and even of Jews despised.

*Vistillia.*

For this thou spurn'st my love and bade depart  
For one who shudders at thee as accurst.

*Gallus.*

If this be true —

*Vistillia.*

If thou canst prove it false  
Hurl me from Tarpeia's rocks sheer to the base.

*Gallus.*

Then may the gods doom me to their worst hate  
If I do not receive thee back again.

*Vistillia.*

And she who stole thee from my previous claim?

*Gallus.*

I leave her to the gods she has forsworn.

*Vistillia.*

The edict reads that those who harbor Christians  
Shall suffer with them. Thou must yield her up.

*Gallus.*

Thou hast not proved it true — it must be false.

*Vistillia.*

Then listen ; lo, the gods have fought for me !

*As they converse they have walked apart  
from the company close to Gallus's house,  
separated from his garden by a hedge of  
trees. Julia is in the garden, singing. Gal-  
lus motions Vistillia away, who returns to  
the revelers while he listens.*

*Julia (singing).*

Jesus, Saviour, Power of God,  
At thy altar, low I lie !  
Deign to me thy grace afford,  
Deign to harken to my cry.  
Impotent my will and power,  
Vain the help that man can give ;  
Be my strength each passing hour,  
Be my help while here I live.

*Gallus (solus).*

How like a bird she sings that mounts to heaven,  
Borne on the wings of his own ecstasy !

*Julia.*

Jesus, Wisdom, Power Divine,  
Pity my dark ignorance !  
Light of Life, within me shine,  
Ever guide me with thy glance.  
Guard from man's philosophy,  
Purge my heart from self-esteem ;  
Let thy Cross my study be,  
Be thy Love my constant theme.

*Gallus (solus).*

How sweet that face like heaven's sunny skies,  
When all the gods smile on us, and that cheek  
Fairer than Hebe's or the rosy stain  
Blushed through the milk-white cup she brought to  
Jove.

I could forgive her every crime but this.  
Gods! not for me she keeps her love, but rather  
To waste her prayers upon the Crucified,  
Despising the immortal gods for Him —  
The gods that send us favoring winds and skies,  
Full-loaded harvests, corn and vines and oil,  
The increase of our flock and all our joys.

*(After a pause.)*

And yet 't were death to cleave my soul from hers.

*(Discovers himself.)*

*Julia.*

My lord, what heavy cloud is o'er thy heart?

*Gallus.*

Thy absence blots the sunshine from my soul.

*Julia.*

Flesh is a weak source for true happiness.

*Gallus.*

But love is the divinest gift of gods.

*Julia.*

But love fails in the palsying hour of death.

*Gallus.*

At death man's only hope is in the gods.

*Julia.*

They have not lifted up the veil for hope.

*Gallus.*

We have been happy — have we not been blest ?

*Julia.*

Aye, my dear lord, but ever o'er our heads  
That sword of Damocles — dissevering Death.

*Gallus.*

What change is this ? Why is thy heart estranged  
Far from the gods ? for this way come sad fears  
And moody fancies, but the gods delight  
To crown with blessing those who honor them.

*Julia.*

Have e'er they given thee thy heart's full prayer ?

*Gallus.*

Even now 't is answered ; even this very morn,  
Learning the will of the unchanging gods  
From entrails of the birds that sing their praise,  
The future-reading augurs prophesy  
To us a child if thou wilt join with me  
In offerings and garlands to the gods  
Upon this dedication at this time.

*Julia.*

My lord, I cannot — never to thy gods.

*Gallus.*

Dear love, what joy can happen save through  
them ?

*Julia.*

The gods thou worshippest are only demons,  
Whose service is destruction worse than death.

*Gallus.*

Oh, deathless curses on th' abhorrent tongue  
Whose deadly casuistry hath so misled thee !

*Julia.*

Truth speaks to those who have an open heart,  
Susceptible, and those who hear obey.

*Gallus.*

Why shouldst thou spurn the gracious gods we love,  
Or wake the dreaded wrath of those we fear ?

*Julia.*

There is no fear of wrath of men or gods  
To those in shelter of the Truth divine.

*Gallus.*

Bethink thee of thy noble father's life,  
Who died in faith and service of the gods.

*Julia.*

No soul is sponsor for another's life ;  
I cannot hurt him, nor can he help me.

*Gallus.*

Thou canst thy mother ; and her reverent head,  
White with the snow of venerable years,  
Will droop with shame at thy apostasy.

*Julia.*

I see a shining path, and at the end  
A great light burning. I must follow on,  
Drawn onward by my inelectable fate.

*Gallus.*

How is my heart made desolate, and my home,  
And bitter all the service of my life,  
Almost as if my gods had failed my hope.

*Julia.*

At any time have e'er thy gods found voice  
Answering thy prayers, or held an unstopped ear  
To pity or preserve? At any time  
Hath the dim plastic future mapped itself  
Before their incorporeal sight aright,  
That seer, priest, virgin, fasting or by vigils  
Alone on lonely mountains, or strong prayers,  
Weeping for sin, induced thy gods to speak  
Through them of days yet distant? Gods of  
stone,  
Chiseled by cunning hands from quarried blocks;  
Idols of wood of which the hewer stood  
Who felled it from the green umbrageous trees,  
And meditated, leaning on his ax:  
"This part shall fire consume to give me warmth,  
Cooking my food; this part the carver's craft  
Shall fashion me a god" — a dead, dried stick,  
Without the sappy life it had in the forest,

When winds blew through its stirring leaves, and  
made  
The semblance of a voice that all might hear.

*Gallus.*

Have not the oracles the future read?

*Julia.*

With double meaning ever do they speak,  
Which any after fact may aptly fit.

*Gallus.*

I worship not dumb images, which are  
But visible reminders of the gods,  
Who are themselves invisible and hid.

*Julia.*

I worship Christ alone, th' Incarnate God.

*Gallus.*

O wife, this Galilean turns a curse!  
Darkly between our lives and mutual hopes  
The blighting shadow of His Cross is cast,  
Like sudden death and ends of life-long loves.

*Julia.*

I love God more, but love thee no whit less.

*Gallus.*

But ah, the bitter, bitter fruit of Christ!  
That sweet companionship — that linked heart,  
Whose pulse beat time with mine, beats so no more.



*Julia.*

I love and reverence thee, my husband, still.

*Gallus.*

Thou walk'st a different path — a way diverse :  
'T is not in me — there is no change in me ;  
Thou hast forsaken me, and not I thee ;  
Thou hast turned false unto thy mother's gods,  
Forsworn thy childhood's faith and the deep joy  
Of love and life — our love that blessed our ways  
And from it all the radiance of our lives.  
Hast thy God given thee fuller joys than these ?  
That made the dear old paths of Mother Earth  
Elysium, and all things upon her breast  
Of majesty and beauty one with us,  
Heart throbbing with them, full of fearless joy  
Interpreting their secrets. Now thy heart  
On some mirage of other worlds is set —  
Some vision the rapt eye of Frenzy sees,  
Of cities fabulous that need no sun  
For light nor sea rolls on their ghostly coast,  
As if the gods despised their handiwork.  
Ah, wife ! in the bright zenith of our joy  
Birds and green leaves and streams and quiet  
nights  
Were of us and our love ; but now how changed !  
With what indifferent eyes thou walk'st abroad,  
As if the soft, rich light of the glad sun,  
The tremulous happiness of chirping fields

And populous grasses quivering with delight  
Were evil, and this earth a charnel-house,  
And love the most accursed thing of all.  
What madness is this creed ! that turns to stone,  
Medusa-like, the promptings of the heart,  
Dwarfing affection and implanting hate  
To all the joys of men and praise of gods,  
Sweet stories and the revelings of the mind,  
Beautiful thoughts and poetry, and words  
Fire-winged from men of god-like gifts and speech.  
Oh ! if there be a God apart, distinct  
From this close, tangible world, ask of your soul  
Can this be laud acceptable to him,  
To hold him as the sleuth-hound on the path  
Of his creation, placing round their souls  
Delight and hope of color, sound, and odor,  
Love and bright fancies woven in the life,  
And to the vibrant soul whose chords respond  
To unseen spiritual touches from their depths,  
Rending it as a culprit. If 't were so  
Better the full womb should abort its fruit,  
And all sweet prattling babes and love's fond hopes,  
And nature and the monstrous universe  
By some inchoate force be hurled again  
To chaos and illimitable death.

*Julia.*

Do I not love thee ? Night and day my prayers,  
With fastings of my body and strong tears

Drawn from my heart, attest to God the love  
I bear thee and my deep and earnest cry  
For thy enlightenment. Oh ! who can know  
Travail of soul like mine — the thorny road,  
The darkness of the path with bleeding feet  
I trod though shrinking impotently, drawn  
As one whom winds and waves have made a prey,  
And forced to an unreckoned consummation  
Before I found this peace ineffable?  
How can I tell thee? How can I describe  
To thee whose soul has never felt alarm,  
Nor seen how o'er th' uncertain path of life  
The hounds of sin and hell hunt down the soul,  
The doom beyond reversal of all flesh  
That dares to stand before the righteous throne  
Of Infinite Holiness in its own name?  
I know not how it slipped o'er my own soul,  
Horror and fear, and consciousness of sin,  
And the appalling vision of the Just  
In whose perfection sin or aught of ill  
Abides not, as in some terrific fire  
The embers are consumed till naught remains;  
But that clear revelation to my soul  
Seized it beyond the sophist's peradventure —  
Oh, strong like truth or griping like despair —  
And all of earth, all helps of books and men,  
All pleasures, hopes, ambitions of the past  
Forsook me as one stepping in quicksand  
Feels the earth reel and sink beneath his feet,

And heaven above brass, and the lights of skies  
Mocking, and nature leagued against his weal,  
And life a drop in th' ocean eternity,  
And all life's hopes and joys and pride but this,—  
As one who, sentenced to be crucified  
To-morrow, should spend all to-day in play,  
Gambling, and worried if he lost the game,  
Or making plans to build him a new house,  
Or any madcap thought or freak, so death  
Dwarfs all our human grandeur ; makes men's joys  
Madness, when the dread after fate is known —  
Tomes, pictures, pleasures — Oh, if one had drunk  
Hemlock inadvertently, how mad  
To loiter on the pathway to the leech  
Admiring some rapt butterfly poised o'er flowers !  
So when I felt my spirit's bonds to sin,  
God's purity, and in me my dread soul  
Deathless, with hell or heaven for its place,  
I had no thought but to escape my doom ;  
Yet all my spirit too was mutinous,  
And every moral fiber in me rose  
'Gainst Christ, and battled strenuously his claims,  
With sinister voices too against God's ways,  
Sad, crass debating wearisome to myself,  
Of sin, foreknowledge, and of his elect,  
For whom my unregenerate heart felt hate ;  
But grisly death and lurid flames of hell  
Flamed nearer, peering in upon my soul  
With raucous echoes of their blasphemies,

And drove me in an agony of fear,  
Hatred, despair, and broken heart for sin  
At Christ's feet, where, like some wild animal  
Held firmly in the victor's net, I struggled —  
Struggled against God's strong compelling love,  
Struggled against the pleading eyes of Christ —  
Until one moment when my heart was changed,  
And love flowed in, and Christ was all in all,  
With sin and fear and unbelief behind,  
And holiness and hope, eternal hope,  
God's love and final triumph over sin,  
And peace before, around, within, above.  
What marvel from my soul's life history then,  
I worship Christ, who died to purchase me.

*Gallus.*

I worship Jove, Mars, Venus, all the gods  
And goddesses, the piety of Rome,  
Our ancestors and fathers gave a name —  
Gods of the hills, the valleys, and the streams,  
The breathing hollows and the listening air,  
Woods and the mighty blue, o'er-arching heavens.  
Oh, serve the thorn-crowned specter of the Cross  
If it beseem religion unto thee,  
But why not reverence too the other gods?

*Julia.*

The Triune God is God of gods, whose word  
Spake into being the cycling universe,  
Which from him throned in inaccessible sheen,

Borrows light and heat and every motive power,  
And will not give his glory to thy gods.

*Gallus.*

What then? If I kneel down to other names,  
Calling him Jove; the Zeus of the Greeks —  
Seers of the pestilent circumcised say Jahveh —  
Although their herd of trembling followers  
Forbear to speak th' Incommunicable Name;  
Thou call'st him Jesus — is he less a god  
Or shorn divinity if thou shouldst homage  
The gods or incense the imperial statue?

*Julia.*

Oh, tempt me not! in vain it is to ask.

*Gallus.*

If I praise Pan on reeds and with sweet savors,  
For ewes that bring forth safely; if I pray  
Pomona for the fullness of the year,  
Red apples and huge grapes that look in the sun  
Bursting with blood for fatness; if of Neptune  
I crave safe passage o'er the rutilant foam,  
And thy God only has the power to hear,  
Shall my sobbed prayer die fruitless in my heart  
Because directed wrong? Nay, rather hold  
The heart being right, this strife of names and  
honors  
The God of gods smiles at, and hears alike  
The grateful soul that prays to Jove or Jesus.

*Julia.*

The blind guide his blind follower leads astray,  
And both fall in the ditch and are destroyed.

*Gallus.*

Art thou aware thy danger? Art aware  
What punishment the Emperor's edict  
Metes to this pestilence? That I too stand  
In this same penalty if I harbor thee?  
Bethink again — burn incense unto Cæsar,  
Or sacrifice to all the living gods.

*Julia.*

Great Cæsar holds his power but by permission,  
And could not stretch his arm forth o'er a saint  
Unless God willed it.

*Gallus.*

Oh! but spare thyself!  
Think of the shame, the agony, the death!

*Julia.*

Earth's agonies have but a temporal pang,  
But after death to souls that slip from God  
There is eternal bale. Oh, fear this more,  
And Christ will dull the fangs of wolfish men!

*During this conversation Vistillia has returned with several male revelers. At this point they discover themselves, seizing Julia, and restraining Gallus, who essays to shield her.*

*First Reveler.*

Hale this blasphemer to the magistrate.

*Second Reveler.*

Nay, Gallus, is this like thy piety ?  
The gods will reap great honor in her death,  
And thou great blessing.

*Gallus.*

Good friends, let me die ;  
My heart is dead already.

*A Priest.*

No — long years  
Winged with ripe blessings now are imminent  
To one who has served the gods as faithfully  
As Gallus has. Oh, crown a noble life  
By cheerfully surrendering unto them  
Their enemy, and surely therefore thine ;  
And haply if thy heart with hers is linked  
That its divorce were death, the pitying gods  
Who heard Pygmalion's prayer will grant repentance  
Unto thy erring wife.

*First Reveler (to his neighbor).*

Ah, desperate hope !  
These Christians die with wondrous obstinacy.

*Second Reveler.*

Deluded fools ! they dream of golden streets  
In some eternal city of the saints,



Domes of clear emerald, chrysoprase and pearl,  
Crystalline rivers and immortal fruits,  
Delicious more than the Hesperides,  
Rewards of martyrdom.

*Third Reveler.*

'T is marvelous !

The other day a boy of fifteen years,  
Mad through this sect, left father, mother, friends,  
And sat on blistering chairs as though on flowers,  
Braved scourge and tongs, and still sang hymns to  
Christ,  
And in the very teeth of seething fire  
That hissed ensanguined by his copious blood  
Refused to worship Cæsar, and so died  
Adoring Christ.

*Second Reveler.*

Rivers of blood have flown,  
And yet this noxious sect makes headway still,  
As though Christ could depose th' immortal gods  
As old gray Saturn was o'erthrown by Jove.

*The priests form in line, approach, and sing  
in succession.*

*First Priest.*

Do they dream that the gods  
We have worshipped for years  
Are as grass of the sods  
That the harvest sun seres ;

That the Christ who was born yesterday  
Should conquer, depose them, and slay ?

*Second Priest.*

Could the Man who in terror  
Cried out on the Cross,  
Convinced of his error,  
To a God who ne'er was —  
Could he guide Neptune's chariot or run,  
And bridle the steeds of the sun ?

*Third Priest.*

Our fathers have told,  
In the years that are past,  
Of the man over bold  
Who would fondly be classed  
With the god of the sun ; and his doom  
Was worse than Christ's Cross and his tomb.

*Fourth Priest.*

Would they have us forsake  
Gods of life and the grave,  
For the Corpse on the stake  
Who himself could not save ?  
Would they have us bow down knee and head  
To a crucified body and dead ?

*Fifth Priest.*

Oh, what succor could be  
To the soul that lifts hand  
Unto eyes that nor see  
Nor can e'er understand ?

Oh, what answer to suppliant breath  
That prays to the stopped ears of Death ?

*Sixth Priest.*

Could this shadow, this shade,  
Of a Being that was  
From the tomb where he laid  
When torn down from the Cross —  
Could he cast off his grave-clothes, and wait  
Where the gods sit in glory and state,  
They would laugh, they would scorn  
This scarred specter of clay,  
Who thus mangled and torn  
Would be even as they ;  
With the marks of the nail and the spear,  
He would wither and die in new fear.

*Julia.*

O blind and unwise !  
In the dark web of Fate,  
Ye shall open your eyes,  
But alas, all too late !  
Your palms itch for blood,  
And your feet run to death ;  
Like a venomous bud  
Is the word of your breath.  
I know that before me  
The path is of pain,  
But the pangs to flow o'er me  
Will rend me in vain.

For Christ the Eternal  
Will clothe me with power,  
And the sorrows I mourn all  
Will die in an hour.  
But when Death springs to sever  
Earth's last prop and thee,  
O skeptic, forever  
Thy torment will be !

*Priest.*

They nailed Christ to the Tree —  
Had he strength to come down ?  
In his side was a spear,  
On his head a mock crown.  
He cried out with fear —  
What hope then for thee ?

*Julia.*

Ere ever the sea had its currents,  
Or the mountains sat firm on their base,  
Or the day had the sun for its guardian,  
Or the stars had their torches and place,  
From the infinite hoar everlasting  
The eternal sure purpose outran  
That God the Creator should ransom  
The sins of the creature man ;  
And so like a bird o'er its nestlings,  
With wide-hovering wings stretched abroad,  
Was love brooding o'er the abysm,  
Even love from the full heart of God.

And so from the very beginning,  
In the regions beneath and above,  
Love fondled the scarred hands of suffering,  
And Mercy was twin-born with Love ;  
Whence down the long vista of ages,  
By prophecy, ritual, and type,  
The message was sung of His advent  
Who should come when his season was ripe.  
O world-wide, expectant tradition,  
Since ever the race began,  
Of a God who should come down from heaven  
In the flesh and the form of a man.

For the seed the Creator had planted  
Had borne him a monstrous fruit,  
And accurséd blossoms were grafted  
Upon an impeccable root.  
In outbreaking sin and rebellion  
In blasphemy, venom, and hate  
Were the race whom the Lord had created  
And blessed in an innocent state ;  
And the Lord looked down from his dwelling,  
And who to his holy throne  
For the race could make expiation  
Or e'en for his own sins atone ?  
None save an immaculate Being  
Of infinite value and worth,  
That owed not a creature's allegiance,  
Could ransom the sin-curséd earth.

Oh, only a God could offer  
A sacrifice so complete  
That Law still could triumph in heaven  
Yet Justice and Mercy meet ;  
That evil should still be punished,  
Yet the sinner be pardoned by law,  
And the serfdom of sin be broken,  
And the kingdom of God without flaw.

Christ descended from heaven  
To die for his own ;  
His sufferings atone  
For the sins of his people, his elect are forgiven ;  
By the nail-print, the thorn-crown, the blood-  
shed, the thrust  
Of the spear, are all shriven  
The sinners repentant who in them put trust.

*Priest.*

Away ! we will not hear this blasphemy.  
Convey her to the magistrate.

*Julia is removed, and Priest addresses  
Chorus :*

What saith the god that spoke through thee to this ?

*Chorus.*

The vision is confused — it is not time.

*Priest.*

Canst thou see nothing ? is she not foredoomed ?

*Chorus.*

I see and see not — though strange specters rise,  
They chase confusedly before my sight.  
Like clouds that break before th' advancing moon,  
And roll fantastically over heaven.

*Gallus.*

I have served all the gods from my youth even up  
to my present age ;  
Let all men look to me now and see how the gods  
give wage.  
I have given them threefold service — the joy of my  
youth and my health,  
The strength of my heart that was fresh, and my  
mind, and the tithe of my wealth ;  
Oblations on numberless altars — where'er men  
erected a shrine,  
To gods of all nations and seasons, with offerings  
of others, were mine ;  
My house was a temple of worship, of incense, of  
prayer, and of praise,  
To the gods whom we reverence and cherish I  
offered the hopes of my days ;  
But, oh ! they are jealous and cruel ; their service  
is bitter as death,  
As an arrow shot into the heart is, or as hemlock is  
to the breath.  
The gods they are mighty in power, they are brave  
and heroic in strife,

They quaff inconceivable depths and immeasurable pleasures of life ;  
But services past they forget, as an eaten fig cast out of date,  
The past they remember alone to sharpen the edge of their hate.  
Of hatred and glory, and pleasure and power, the gods have above,  
But they know not to pity — O pitiless gods ! and they know not to love.  
I would I had died ere this day. O ye gods ! that the white-shafted spear  
Of lightning had pierced through my heart-strings — the death that men reverence and fear ;  
In the regions of shadows, where shadows had counted me smit of their rods,  
I had known myself that the gods were pitiful, merciful gods.  
But now to what place can I go ? or what brightness of day-spring can dawn,  
When she who made home for me heaven, and day a bright sunshine, is gone ?  
I speak in the bitterness, yea, of my soul — in the blight of my heart :  
Are the gods a delusion and snare ? do they mock us and jeer us who smart ?  
Did they know of the dove that I fed from my lips and kept warm in my breast,  
That a hawk would swoop down from the bright sky and rifle my nest ?



And lapped in Olympian ease did they watch it  
with hands all supine  
And see the bloody beak seize on the white-winged  
treasure of mine ?  
For well the gods knew that in heart she is pure as  
the bud of a flower,  
Though the dust of a passing wind wafting may  
sprinkle it o'er in its bower,  
But the odorous blossom unfolding sifts the dust  
from the opening bud —  
O pitiless, pitiless gods, is there joy in the scenting  
of blood ?

*Priest.*

Pitiful are the gods, nor fond of blood,  
Loving, nor send Affliction's ravening beak ;  
But lingering near are Mercy's spread-wings hover-  
ing,  
Ready, like mother-birds, for swift descent.  
'T is not for us to know the gods' designs,  
But when they smite to bless them even then.  
Thee without doubt the gods forgive hard thoughts,  
Dread, rash, and unpremeditated words  
Wrung from thee by despair, and doubtless too  
Blessing shall blossom yet upon thy life,  
More sweet for present sorrow and distress.

*Gallus.*

Ah, how now can they bless me ? Hear once more.  
Spring morning breaking over eastern hills

In quietness and beauty is not sweeter  
To hearts that cowered beneath the thunderous  
storm,

When winds have writhed like wrestlers with the  
trees,

Uptorn foundations, and drenched flooded homes,—  
The first sweet morn of peace is not more fair  
To such, I say, than was her smile to me,  
Nor the green cape of home that shines through  
mist

And purple distance like a beckoning god  
To weary sailors buffeted by seas  
Contrary and long driven by stormy gales,  
A sight more loved and longed for than the home  
She made for me these three years past. O gods!  
Where shall I find a being now like her?  
Who trust, or where give love if in long years  
Grief shall grieve grief away as lawless fires,  
Flapping their wings of flame, bring fiercer heat  
And so consume themselves — to whom give love  
If e'er my heart shall grow another spring,  
Or trust what prophecy, or e'er again  
Give laud and offering to th' unaiding gods,  
When thus one worthy of all trust and love,  
One prophecy the most divinely good,  
One woman faultless in the years now fled,  
Beyond all others loved of men or gods,  
Ends in such burning — acid-like to bone  
And broken heart and ruined life of love,

Cold hearthstone and dismembered wreck of home?  
But, friends, forgive me ! grief is garrulous ;  
I will depart, and let no word of mine  
Weigh heavy on your souls. The gods are wise —  
Doubtless the gods are wise, and 'tis your wisdom  
To serve and please them — these are my last  
words.

What else you've heard, pray pardon me — my  
grief

Hath changed my spirit so I have forgotten  
To speak like my own self. Dear friends, farewell.

*He leaves, proceeding down the path that  
leads to his own house.*

*First Priestess.*

With an audible sound to my ear,  
As the rushing of birds of ill-omen to feast on their  
prey,  
The gods lift the curtain, and clear  
I see a perspicuous ray.  
He hath spoken — e'en now hath he gone  
To his doom,  
And the wrath of the gods that have tracked him  
e'er since he was born  
Now hurry him on to his tomb.

*Second Priestess.*

Men do an evil thing  
In the hasty, ardent spring

Of their life, and they die,  
And they leave a glorious fame  
And their wealth and their name  
To their children, and their house  
Is uplifted proud and high,  
And the laurel crowns their brows,  
And they feast and they marry,  
And they take and give spouse  
With the mighty and the great,  
And in luxury long they carry  
Their station in the state.  
'T is an honor to be born  
From the loins of their race,  
Whose descendants joy to trace  
The founder of their dawn.  
But alas, and alas !  
For the fate that comes to pass,  
For the gods remember ever  
The hero's sins, that never  
Had a lustral sacrifice  
Offered to them for his vice,  
And in fulness of the times  
Lo ! the unforgetting gods  
Smite his house with their rods,  
And his latest generations for his crimes.

*Chorus of Priestesses.*

The house is built upon sin  
And now doth judgment begin.

The gods shall requite on his head  
His own sins surely, and even the sins of the dead.  
Hence the wife of his heart  
From the gods doth depart,  
And to her whom he loved and betrayed  
A bitter revenge is given,  
And in that she lusted for vengeance 't is made  
Her punishment too by heaven.

*Near the entrance of his house Gallus meets  
Vistillia, who insists upon the fulfilment of  
his promise.*

*Gallus.*

Oh, say it not ! I'll hear no more of this.  
Thou wouldst wreath myrtle on a sarcophagus.

*Vistillia.*

Thy promise— shall my love be still disdained ?

*Gallus.*

My promise — ah, Vistillia, dost thou know  
I love my wife now more than e'er before.  
Where'er I turn I see her loving eye  
Shining, and like a ghost of Pleasure dead  
Her form glides by me, passing and repassing ;  
Her lustrous hair and the unnamable grace  
That sat on her white brow are e'er before me.  
If I should mate again my soul would dream  
Of her I loved more fondly, and awaking

To find another lying in her place  
My hand were apt to throttle her in sleep.

*Vistillia.*

Thy wife was recreant to the gods and thee.

*Gallus.*

If thou lovest life and length of days and limbs  
Marred not, then never let thy lips again  
Frame words nor let thy thoughts run in such  
    groove  
As on thy undissembling face may show  
Casting a shadow over her white name,  
To me no recreant, and th' omnipotent gods,  
Let them urge their own cause. I do repent  
That ever I was privy to her faith,  
And so the sure means of her certain death.  
This is the worst curse that the gods pronounce,  
That death should seal the lips of injured love  
Before they have absolved the injurer.  
Hell hath no sharper polished barb of hate  
Than this.

*Vistillia.*

In me behold the human cause,  
And it became me, for she was my rival.  
But come, now play the man. The gods, not you,  
In their eternal purpose planned events,  
Making the womb of Time big with results.  
The deed predestined, who can thwart the gods?

If I had cause to slay, no weak remorse  
Should haunt me like a coward, nor stay my hand.

*Gallus (in sudden frenzy).*

It shall not me,  
And let the gods stand sponsor for it, too !

*(Stabs her.)*

*(After Pause).* And by the same red channel let  
me float

Out on the sanguinary seas of Death.

*(Stabs himself.) Several of the assembly  
hasten to the scene of the tragedy.*

*First Arrival.*

Is he dead ?

*Second Arrival.*

Quite dead — no echo of the heart remains.  
Vistillia, too, to that dread bourn hath gone.

*First Arrival.*

Aye, what despair is here ! Believe me, sir,  
Some sudden madness seized his brain and heart,  
Driving his hand to deeds unlike himself.

*Chief Priest.*

This is the sleep we fear, and all things fear —  
Man lordliest and the animals in all ranks,  
The kingliest lions and the shivering mouse,  
Creatures that fly through limitless wastes of air

Seeing the sun with wide unwinking eyes,  
And myriad hosts of fragile beautiful wings  
Noiseless as flakes of snow or sap in leaves,  
Monsters in the deep seas and tiny fins —  
All fear the reign of Death, and yet our friend  
Prematurely sought it — rashly brave,  
Calling for Death ere Death had called for him,  
Yet chancing that which many great men had done,  
Whether for good or ill who knows? Perchance  
This fate of righteous men and vile alike,  
Death, of itself is neither bad nor good —  
Neutral ; but in the kingdom of the dead  
The after fate may make it bad or good.  
So shall I fondly hope when Death's cry comes  
Me-ward from out the darkness of the grave,  
That in it there shall still be the same gods,  
With the same laws of righteousness and love  
For men of clean white souls and crystal thoughts ;  
And so I trust not cowardly to die,  
But as a son in conscious rectitude,  
Ready to meet whate'er the gods decree  
Serene and without fear ; but oh, the change  
From living flesh through loathsomeness to dust,  
Which though concealed by pregnant sods that  
    hear  
The whispering winds of spring and feel warm rain,  
White shafts of sunlight and cool mouths of dews  
Robing in grass and leaf and fragrant flower  
The place of burial, yet I firmly know



Beneath are lips that Love, that once clung close  
Vibrating with passionate kisses and desire,  
As humming-birds bill deep in hearts of flowers —  
That Love would flee in horror and disgust  
Fair eyes and splendid hair once loved and fondled,  
More sickening now than smoothing serpent skins,  
Foulness in ears that drank Love's oaths, and arms  
And members all dismembered and decayed  
White hands and thighs and the warm musk-like  
breasts

Whereon Love pillowed — these are spoils of Death,  
Who recks not tender babe nor reverent head.  
And I, an orphan and unknown of kin,  
For which I thank the gods, and without wife  
(Spouseless and childless I shall go to death),  
Cheating stern Death of so much dread and sorrow,  
For all these ties of love and joys of home  
Make Death a greater terror, yet myself  
Mourn this man here, whom well I knew, and  
mourn

Choice converse and that mutual help and cheer  
Congenial souls and righteous friends impart,  
Which I from him received, and so to me  
Earth is that much less lovely. O bright sun  
And shining stars, and thou sun-gilded cloud  
Floating like happiness so fleet, so high,  
How pitiless the beauty of ye all!  
Though men's hearts break, and tears and shudder-  
ing sobs

Of human sorrow bow the race to earth,  
 Ye care not, but shine yet more glorious  
 As if to mock the griefs of petty souls  
 With your eternal ray; and even the flowers  
 And grasses wet with blood, the evening dews  
 Will wash the stain away, and the glad morn  
 Shine on them fresh and beautiful again,  
 As if there were no sorrow in the world.  
 So ere man's foot yet trod the infant globe  
 It was, and so when the last man hath gone  
 To the dark kingdoms of the nether world  
 The sun will rise as glorious, and the moon  
 As softly, and the flowery fields of earth  
 Swing censers filled with incense to the gods  
 Forgetful of their broken plaything — man!

*Another Priest (sings).*

Of friends most fondly cherished  
 This man in life was chief;  
 Belovéd thus and perished,  
 What song of sad relief  
 May Love sing o'er his body  
 With sobbing lips of grief!

When Life and Love and Sorrow  
 Bow o'er th' unheeding dead,  
 What tributes can they borrow  
 From all the past has said?  
 Vain tears and vainer memory  
 Till the same path we tread.

I had by birth no brother,  
Yet he was dear, God know'th,  
As though a common mother  
Had borne and suckled both.  
He was my childhood's playmate  
And love grew with our growth.

He was my boyhood's hero,  
His thoughts were law to me,  
A man without a fear, oh,  
Grand and true and free !  
If others found thee faultful,  
Those faults I could not see.

Yet here he lies before you,  
Cold hand clasped o'er still breast  
That breathed this morning o'er you  
Of mortal thoughts the best,  
That men should love and worship  
And kiss the gods' behest.

For in Life's best completeness,  
Where man earth's pathway plods,  
In charity and sweetness  
He served th' immortal gods,  
And died still clean and spotless,  
Though smitten by their rods.

Yet setting in affliction  
And darkness, none, I wis,  
But holds the firm conviction,  
Where'er his spirit is  
Is sunshine everlasting  
And the abode of bliss.

Yet earth to me is darkened,  
And day more drear than night;  
Bird-songs to which he hearkened  
And flowers of his delight,  
Lush grass and glassy streamlets  
Have power to hurt and smite.

For every thought of Nature  
He loved with heart sincere,  
Each leaf and bud and creature  
To him alike was dear.  
I saw them with his eyesight  
And heard them with his ear.

How can the gods requite me  
For such a loss as this?  
What friendship can delight me  
Unshared by clasp of his?  
And is there love and clasping  
Hands where now he is?

*In the Gods' Shadow.*

And when I shall go to him  
Through dread, drear ways of Death,  
Will he be as I knew him  
Whom no flesh compasseth?  
Are ties that bind men earthward  
Ensnapped as they lose breath?

Farewell, true-hearted lover!  
This fate at least was thine —  
No long years shall discover  
Mortality's dread sign,  
A ruinous body living,  
A wandering mind supine.

But if through years of duty  
The gods prolong my day,  
Immortal youth and beauty,  
Thou shalt to Memory's ray  
Recur as one untarnished  
By age or earth's decay.

*Chorus of Priestesses.**First Priestess.*

The gods rule the earth  
Giving peace, giving strife,  
And the blast of their breath  
Is the time of man's birth;  
And the term of his life,  
And the hour of his death,

And the deeds of the hand,  
And the thought of the brain,  
And the hopes of a man,  
As the gods may command  
Are achieved or are vain  
As accords with their plan ;  
For with pleasure or woe,  
Or with glory or shame,  
Or with weakness or might,  
Unto every man so  
As the gods may forename  
Shall the path of his life be in darkness or light.

*Second Priestess.*

With man is the planting of seed,  
But the gods all the harvesting send ;  
With man the intent and the deed,  
With the gods the result and the end ;  
With man is the bow and the string,  
And the arrow that darts from the bow,  
But the gods guard the power of its wing  
And give it direction to go.  
For good or for ill it may be,  
For a crown or deserving of rods,  
But the fate every mortal will see  
Is foreknown and foredoomed of the gods.  
And Pain is the shadow of Pleasure,  
And Sorrow the specter of Joy,  
And Shame but a different measure  
Of Glory the gods would destroy.

*Chorus of Priestesses.*

Till the scene-shifting curtain is drawn,  
Till the last sun sets over the stage,  
Who can tell if the man that is born  
Should exult or be sad of his age?  
Rejoice not in greatness and glory,  
Nor in wealth nor in station depend —  
Thou knowest not Life's finished story  
Nor see'st how the morrow shall end.  
And ever to those who are highest  
The deepest reverse may o'ertake,  
As the bird that flies boldest and nighest  
The sun may be snared by the snake.  
Then grant us gods' footing and place  
In Life's intermediate state,  
Beyond the base taint of disgrace,  
Beneath the gods' envy or hate !

1888.



